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254,330.68

Rating:
Mature

Archive Warning:
Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Categories:
M/M, F/M

Fandom:
Avatar: The Last Airbender

Relationships:
Sokka/Zuko (Avatar), Sokka & Zuko (Avatar), Katara & Zuko (Avatar), Aang & Katara (Avatar), Toph Beifong & Sokka, Aang & Zuko (Avatar), Toph Beifong & Zuko, Katara & Sokka (Avatar), The Gaang & Zuko (Avatar), Zhao & Zuko (Avatar)

Characters:
Sokka (Avatar), Zuko (Avatar), Katara (Avatar), Toph Beifong, Aang (Avatar), The Gaang (Avatar), Azula (Avatar), Iroh (Avatar), Zhao (Avatar), Hakoda (Avatar), Bato (Avatar), Suki (Avatar), A bunch of OCs, a whole bunch of them running around, some you will like... some you won't

Additional Tags:
Slow Burn, Enemies to Friends to Lovers, super slow burn, Badass Sokka (Avatar), Badass Zuko (Avatar), Gaang (Avatar) as Family, Zhao (Avatar) Is An Asshole, Zuko is an Awkward Turtleduck, zuko is trying, but not really, Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con, Past Child Abuse, Dark, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Sokka isnt there so things go different for the gaang, Prison, Torture, Eventual Sokka/Zuko (Avatar), Protective Sokka (Avatar), Protective Zuko (Avatar), Gaang is like woah, Zuko (Avatar) Needs a Hug, Sokka (Avatar) Needs a Hug, Nudity, Underage - Freeform, I mean its prison so..., I'm trying to tag all the things that might happen, Zhaos in the story so what do you expect, Animal Death, Angst, Panic Attacks, Forest Lesbians, throwing up, zuko/zhao - Freeform, Implied/Referenced Sexual Assault

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of Leaving It All Behind • Next Work →

Collections:
My fave zuko whump fics, zukka, Pastels fics, International Fanworks Day 2022 - Classic Fic Recs, Cloud & Shinra Best Fic, fics i will read for ever and ever and ever and ever, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, We Scream Into The Void, THE GAANGSTER FFS, krakengirl's top tier favs of all time, atla fics I would die for, MoreATLAship

Stats:
Published: 2021-03-14 Completed: 2021-08-14
Words: 259,814 Chapters: 21/21 Comments: 3,449 Kudos: 4,984 Bookmarks: 1,089 Hits: 197,440

Leaving It All Behind

Sreeder

Chapter 13: Escape

Notes:

Just jam out to whatever it was that wet your whistle last chapter.

I also wanted to point out that I could have totally split this up into two chapters and stretched everything way out, but I didn't... so...

Enjoy.

:)

(See the end of the chapter for more notes.)

Leaving It All Behind

Chapter 13: Escape

The warden's voice sent cold chills shooting down Sokka's spine, the man's voice carried a certain nag to it that made a person want to punch him directly in his stupid-fucking-pointy-nose. But ever since Sokka had been whipped on the warden's order, the man's voice also triggered a special pocket of fear dedicated just to him.

Sokka's eyes lifted slowly to meet the warden's sneering expression, the smoke was beginning to accumulate in the room around them as the fire continued to spread through the burning cabin. Their eyes locked together, the malice and excitement in the warden's twisted expression made Sokka's chills surface into small bumps scattered across his arms and the beck of his neck.

"You stupid Water Tribe savage, I knew it was a waste of time to keep you here. Admiral Zhao should have killed you the first day you proved to be useless."

The warden flicked his wrist in a swirling motion, bending a long fire whip, he cracked the air before pulling the stream of flames back to his side. The man's crooked teeth poked through his smirking lips, he licked the front of his discolored smile. (A disgusting habit, for a disgusting man.) Sokka watched as the fire bender slid his foot back, the same way he watched Zuko do earlier, his brain registered the motion - the warden was preparing to strike.

Sokka scrambled to his feet as quickly as his disoriented body would let him, still clutching the necklace in his hand, the ribbon twisted tightly between his fingers. He could feel the concealed bundle of parchment scraping lighting against the skin of his torso where it was tucked in his waistband, next to the knife.

Sokka stumbled backwards when the tip of the fire whip struck *way* too close to his face, the heat from the attack left a first degree burn on the tip of his nose. The warden seemed pleased by what Sokka was sure was the pure terror flashing in his wide blue eyes. Sokka felt trapped when his back pressed firmly against the wall, there were only two options, stay and fight or bail into the suffocatingly, smokey hallway.

Both options fucking *sucked* and Sokka was sick and tired of being helpless… he wanted to be brave and fight back, but the fear wouldn't allow him to move his body, all he could do was stare at the warden. The world faded into just him and the fire whip, his eyes followed the blistering whip as it danced at the warden's side. The man pulled the whip back once more and with a quick motion of his wrist, he thrust the flaming attack forward.

Sokka closed his eyes and made the usual mistake of lifting his arms to block the attack from striking his face, it was the same mistake that had earned him most of the scars on his arms. The scattered straight lined scars were a testament on Sokka's forearms of all the times a guard struck him; they were ugly, painful reminders of the type of treatment he had suffered the last two months.

Holding his breath... Sokka waited for what he was sure would be the burning pain accompanied with the smell of smoldering flesh when the whip aimed to strike him in the chest, landed it's blow.

Instead, he heard a muffled curse and a loud crash.

Sokka cracked one eye open and his mind buzzed when he saw Zuko standing in front of him and the warden crumpled on the ground. Zuko turned his head, enough so Sokka could see the good side of his face and that he was glaring at him, one of his *actually-angry* glares.

His face was coated in a healthy layer of dirt, mixed with ash, stuck to dried blood and sweat. Sokka was surprised to see his golden eyes flashing with anger through the filth. Zuko's dark hair was sticking up in random places and it almost looked a light brown color from all the dust that was caked through it. Sokka could also see that he had developing bruises on his face and neck, but at least he was alive.

"I fucking knew you would come here! How did I know you would come here!?" His raspy voice was hoarse, probably from inhaling all the dust and smoke when he was fighting the earth bender.

Sokka gave him an innocent smile in response. "Well if you knew I would come here, then you obviously knew how important it was for me to get it… Now, more importantly, we have to get the fuck out of here."

Zuko shook his head. "No, I need something from here too…"

The other boy's golden eyes shot over to the hallway and then back to the warden who was on his feet again, whip twirling over his head. The warden cackled when he sent the stream of fire back around, Zuko held up an arm and somehow blocked the quick whip of fire before it made contact with them. The warden continued his assaults with swift angry attacks. Sokka watched in amazement as Zuko blocked every single one of them, his stance rooted in the ground in front of Sokka, keeping the Water Tribe boy from being burned.

Sokka felt a desperate, almost primal need to help in some way. He moved closer to Zuko so the other boy could hear him, while he continued doing the *amazing* job of blocking the incoming fire whip attacks.

"What do you need? I'll go get it!"

"You won't know what it is."

"I can try to figure it out at least, because I already *know* can't block fire! What is it?"

"Dual broadswords, in the weapons room – brown and gold sheath, first door on the right… It should be in the back corner against the wall."

Sokka nodded, not *entirely* sure what broadswords were or why they were important to Zuko, but if he remembered correctly, the boy seemed comfortable and almost *natural* holding a sword earlier and Sokka was willing to get *anything* that would help Zuko fight better. The better Zuko could fight, the easier it would be for them to get the fuck out of here.

Sokka dipped into the hallway, pulling his tunic over his nose in a feeble attempt to filter the heavy clouds of smoke from entering his lungs. The metal floor was beginning to heat up, Sokka's could feel his bare feet starting to sting as he hopped from one foot to another in front of the door, using the same fancy-towel to grab the now scorching handle.

The door swung open and a rush of heat from the inferno inside blasted Sokka in the face, the fire was consuming the building quickly, they didn't have much time before the entire cabin would be gone… Sokka entered the room and hastily began rummaged through the weapons, his mind kept wondering what the fuck broadswords were…

His eyes landed on the long, brown and gold sheath with a strap, leaning against the wall in the back right corner, just where Zuko said it would be. Sokka flinched back when a piece of the ceiling crumbled and his face was hit with a rush of heat. He reached up with his only working arm and frantically touched both of his eyebrows, exhaling a sigh of relief when he found they were both still there.

Another cracking sound from above sent Sokka lunging forward towards the weapon, his feet were burning so badly his brain wouldn't let him forget about the throbbing agony. As soon as the sheath was tightly within his grasp, he turned and ran from the room not even bothering to close the door behind him.

When Sokka threw himself back into the main room once again, the tunic fell from his face and he inhaled a deep breath, coughing harshly as he sputtered and choked on the smoke. Sokka abruptly noticed the large amount of damage that had been inflicted to the room in the short period of time he was gone.

The warden and Zuko were locked in an up close battle, Zuko was quick with his jabs and kicks, but the warden seemed to be equally matched in his hand to hand combat skills. The warden was also wielding fire, while Zuko was not. Sokka stood just outside of the hallway and watched, his heart pounding against his ribs, as the warden landed a fiery blow to Zuko's ribs and the bender hissed from the pain, earning a snide comment from the man.

"Aww, are you not feeling very well, your *highness*?"

Zuko growled in response, the look in his eyes made Sokka's mouth feel dry, there was a burning rage behind Zuko's focused glare. Zuko ducked under another blow the warden brought down, he just barely missed a face full of fire. Dropping to the ground, Zuko spun and kicked out one of his legs, successfully hooking the warden by the ankle. The warden seemed to have been expecting an attack to his stance, but the speed of Zuko's movement caught him off guard and he fell to the ground with a heavy thud, not having enough time to catch himself.

Zuko went to push himself back to his feet when the warden kicked out one of his own legs and caught Zuko on the left side of his face. Sokka winced when Zuko's smaller body lost it's balance and he fell back to the floor, he could see the heavy blow to his face had Zuko disoriented. Sokka's eyes widened as he watched Zuko roll over onto his stomach, his eyes were unfocused and he swayed to the side when tried to lift himself up again. Sokka could see Zuko's exhaustion in every breath he took and the way his trembling arms struggled to push his body off the floor.

The warden rose to his feet with ease, once standing again, he spit out a mixture of blood and saliva next to Zuko's face. Sokka's heart began to clamber around his throat when he saw the man open his hand.. Sokka could see the heat beginning to form in his palm as he stood over Zuko - he was going to kill him, he was going to kill Zuko.

"The Admiral should have killed you a long time ago, rather than keep you alive to be his play thing. Well, it looks like he isn't here to save you this time, I will make sure to finish what the Fire Lord started you worthless, pathetic, disappointment, only good for-"

Things started to happen in slow motion for Sokka after the word 'disappointment', he could feel when his legs started to move on their own, his eyes narrowed in on the warden and his vision tunneled. Sokka felt himself lose control as the sound of the crackling fire burning around him consumed his every thought, he felt himself begin to *run.*

Sokka lunged at the warden, his primal instincts to protect Zuko took over, the anger he felt deep inside him as an always steady presence, began to surface. His only goal was to make sure the warden didn't have a chance to unleash his fire onto Zuko; he wasn't allowed to *kill* Zuko.

The warden was completely caught off guard when he and Sokka fell to the ground in a heavy heap of limbs. Sokka fumbled with the dagger in his hands, his arms shaking violently from the fear mixed together with anger, fueled by his adrenaline. It wasn't until he could feel the heat from the warden's fire that he screamed out, he could feel when the flames started to lick open his flesh.

The warden had a burning hand pressed against Sokka's side, the pain was absolutely unbearable, he couldn't have imagined a burn hurting as bad as this one did. The fire seemed to enter his body and flow through his veins, pushing the shooting pain through his core. He had to do something to stop it, or the warden was going to kill him, he could feel the burn, *burning* as it spread out from the point of contact.

His only good hand still held the necklace, pressing the ribbon against the handle of the dagger. Sokka didn't remember when he began to thrust the blade in a downward motion; he couldn't see where the sharp tip entered first, but he could hear the howls of pain coming from the man he was tangled with. He knew the blade had made contact somewhere when he felt the warmth blossom underneath his hand.

Even as the man struggled to pull himself away and the fire in his hands died down to nothing, Sokka continued to thrust the blade into him, over and over, as hard and fast as he could. He couldn't let this man get back up, he couldn't let him *burn* him… he couldn't let him *burn* Zuko…

He could feel the warmth from the warden's blood traveling across his body, soaking into the fibers of his prison pants, it was the type of sensation you could never forget. Blood was a thick, moving liquid that was alive and almost hot to the touch, maybe that was a fire bending thing? He would have to ask Zuko if his blood was hot, he wondered if Zuko would know the answer to that?

Sokka was lost in his mindless stabbing motions and babbling half-put-together thoughts when he felt strong arms wrap around his chest and heave his body back... away from the liquid warmth, away from the stabbing motion… his mind felt fuzzy and confused by the sudden loss. The arms vanished and two hands gripped his shoulders with iron-like force, they were wet and warm, he glanced down to see blood soaked, pale fingers gripping the grey and red fabric covering his shoulder.

Was his prison uniform always grey and red?

Sokka's eyes trailed up one of the arms that was filled with bruises and scars, some of them looked *years* too old. When he got to the bruised neck, the smaller scarred ear and angry red skin, he knew he was looking at Zuko. His eyes finally trailed up his face and found those strong, determined gold eyes staring straight at him.

His one eyebrow was narrowed and he gave Sokka a light shake and for some stupid reason Sokka couldn't pull himself out of the fog that clouded his mind... he felt lost, scared and alone. He *did* begin to notice when Zuko started yelling at him, his broken voice sounded weaker than usual, he must be so tired… Sokka felt tired too.

"SNAP. THE. FUCK. OUT. OF. IT!!"

… maybe he wasn't that tired.

Zuko shook Sokka harder this time, so hard that his neck cracked from the intensity of the shake – he would expect nothing less from an annoyed Zuko. This time the fog lifted and Sokka started to choke on the smoke that was smothering him from the inside out. He noticed Zuko had started making small movements with his arms, he was trying to bend the heat back and keep the flames from getting too close to them.

"Get up!" With one arm, Zuko pushed back the fire that was trying to jump from the wall onto the floor, and with the other arm he began to pull on Sokka. Zuko's tug sent a jolt of pain shooting through Sokka's body, he yelled out in a cracked, pained, yelp. Zuko stopped and bent down to meet Sokka's eyes again.

"You're hurt, where? Arm?"

Zuko started poking him with a finger on the one hand that he had apparently dedicated to Sokka, and when his fucking finger landed on Sokka's dislocated shoulder, he yelled out in pain. Zuko's brow furrowed deeper and he used both hands to *gently* touched his injury and the surrounding area on his arm and back. Sokka felt himself lean into Zuko's warm touch, it had been *so long* since he had felt a friendly touch, even if it was just to assess his injuries, it was better than nothing.

"It's dislocated, hold still... I'll push it back in. It's going to hurt."

His touch may have been gentle, but his words were as serious and straightforward, as always.

Sokka winced when Zuko stood and pulled Sokka's arm out straight in front of him, Zuko moved quickly, but still, very gently. He seemed to be taking great care in treating Sokka's injury, but the fire around them was becoming more of a life threatening situation, than just an annoying inconvenience. So they had to move fast or risk getting trapped inside the burning building.

"C-can you please c-count to three?" Sokka felt like a baby, but he was sure he was covered in blood (he refused to look at it) and his side was burning because… well because he was fucking burned, and now Zuko was looking at him all concerned and trying to be helpful, and it was all just… too much.

"Ugh, Fine. One -"

Sokka's arm made a fucking *horrible* popping sound and then there was a rush of sweet, comfortable relief. Sokka tested out his arm and smiled when he found he had a full range of motion, there was only a small discomfort now and he could happily deal with that.

"Much bet-"

Before Sokka could finish his sentence Zuko grabbed the front of his tunic and hoisted Sokka to his feet again, demonstrating his annoyingly powerful strength.

"WE HAVE TO GO!"

Sokka nodded, and both boys took off towards the door. Sokka still held the bloody dagger, intertwined with his mother's necklace… both were coated in a dried layer of blood. Sokka couldn't resist looking back, his eyes caught a glimpse of the crumpled corpse, fallen in the middle of the burning room…

The dead man's blood pooled around the body and his crumpled corpse cast a dancing shadow against the flames, moving across the floor in a way that made Sokka's skin crawl. He was dead, the man who just a moment ago was trying to kill him and Zuko. If he wouldn't have done something… he might have *killed* them.

Sokka turned to look at Zuko again, only to receive a flying boot thrown in his face, hitting him smack-dab in the jaw.

"What the fuck, Zuko?!"

"Put them on, you need shoes."

Sokka looked down at his bare feet, he didn't notice before, but there was dried blood in between his toes and splattered over the skin of his feet and ankles. *Why was his life such a mess?* Sokka stumbled around, sliding the brown boots onto his feet, glancing over at Zuko, he saw the boy's own baggy prison pants were bunched up above his own identical pair of brown boots.

"They are guard uniform issued boots, they'll be good for walking through the forest and they'll give you some protection from the heat, but lace them tight, I am sure they will be too big."

Zuko was out the door with Sokka trailing behind him, taking the boy's advice, he pulled the laces as tight as he could, but he was right, the boots were still two sizes too big. But *anything* was better than *barefoot*.

"T-thanks." Sokka managed to mutter. He stepped down the dreaded three steps of Zhao's porch and realized that this was going to be the last time he ever had to step foot in that cabin again. One, was because the cabin was going to burn down to the ground tonight. The second, was because they were fucking *escaping.*

He and Zuko turned to head towards the south entrance, if they stayed close enough to the prison wall it would hopefully stay dark enough that they could slip through the rest of the camp undetected. The group of earth benders that were dealing with the guards earlier were gone, all that remained were three bodies left to lay in the blood stained dirt.

There was a loud rumble from under the earth followed by a huge explosion, both boys instinctively turned and saw what remained of a fiery blast that went off in the middle of the kitchen. The fire had moved its way through the mess hall and was attempting to consume the kitchen next, there were a lot of things in the kitchen that had the potential to blow up…

Zuko's eyes were wide and Sokka realized what he was thinking… *Chang.*

Before either of them could overthink anything, they were sprinting towards the kitchen. Zuko was much faster than Sokka, he consistently stayed a few paces ahead, his feet never really touched the dirt as he sprinted towards the back of the kitchen. They rounded the corner and slowed down before they slipped back into the shadows. Sokka tried to follow Zuko's step for step as he silently moved through the darkness, only visible to Sokka's eye.

The back door was locked, Zuko shook the handle angrily before he took a few steps back and shifted into a rooted stance. Sokka watched the other boy kick out his leg followed by a stream of fire. As Zuko kicked the door, he blasted a shot of fire at the place where the door connected to the wall and locked.

The metal lock melted from the heat and Zuko kicked it once more, this time the impact from the kick busted the lock without any hesitation, the door opened and both boys ran in.

Once inside, Sokka had to take a step back, his arm lifted in an attempt to shelter his face from the intense heat that was still cooped up inside from the explosion. Slowly, the inferno seemed to push back and Sokka lowered his arm to see Zuko bending a path through the fire's heat to Chang's office.

That's where they found the fallen support beam that was blocking the entrance to Chang's office door. The adrenaline that fueled the short walk through fire doubled when Sokka saw that Chang might probably be trapped in his office; they would have to move the fallen beam if they hoped to get him out.

Without a word, both boys took a section of the metal at opposite ends and pulled, the massive structure shifted but didn't move like they needed it to. They tried again, but the results were similar. It would take much more strength than Zuko and Sokka had to move something that big.

"It's not fucking working." Zuko mumbled through his grit teeth.

"No, it's too heavy." Sokka could feel the sweat pouring down his face, the tiny droplets tickling his cheeks as they fell from his eyelashes. "If we can't move it, then we can't get the door open… is Chang even inside?"

Zuko shrugged, the stupid fire bender wasn't even sweating. Thankfully, the flames were pushed back enough that they weren't tickling at his calves anymore, but the entire kitchen was on fire and it was hotter than an oven. He watched as Zuko jumped onto the support beam, pressing his face up to the door he yelled.

"Chang!?"

There was only the sound of melting metals and crackling wood for a minute until…

"ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?!"

Zuko winced dramatically and his eyes met with Sokka's. "Yeah, he's in there."

For the first time that night, Sokka smiled, because even in an earth bending prison attack, where everything was on fire, Chang was still… Chang. Sokka never realized how much he depended on the man's consistency in his day to day routine, he was a bright spot in his rather depressing life.

Zuko turned his face back to the door and yelled again. "Hang on Chang, we are going to get you out!"

He turned and jumped down from the beam, he tried very hard to hide the pained expression that flashed across his face from landing, but Sokka didn't give him grief for it. He needed to think very quickly about how to get Chang out of his office, if not… the fire would reach him soon and he would burn alive in that tiny space. He didn't let his mind wander to the thought of Chang, as large as he was, being trapped in that office as the fire -

Sokka chased back the thoughts as he moved closer, inspecting the door, his eyes trailed over every inch as tried to spot a weakness. His blue eyes rested on the door's hinges, the door opened outward, which is why the support beam was keeping it from opening. But the hinges could be removed by popping the pins out of place, without the hinges they could remove the door all together and Chang could just walk out and over the fallen support beam.

"Zuko, I have a plan."

The fire bender threw his head back and groaned into the air dramatically, "finally! I was beginning to think you actually thought we would be able to lift this thing."

Sokka shot him a fake glare, but his smile stayed, so his face probably just looked stupid but Zuko didn't seem to notice. "Go over to the door, and check the door's hinges, do they have a metal pin in the middle?"

Teo and his dad loved Fire Nation technology, just not the Fire Nation itself. The Mechanist taught Sokka all about the Fire Nation's metal work and the way some of their simplest designs were so incredibly effective. He used to tell Sokka and Teo that the Fire Nation wasn't winning the war because of their *bending*, they were winning the war because of their *engineering*.

"I… guess? Yeah, I think I see the pin."

"Okay we need to tap that pin out of place, try to push it up from the bottom, just be careful those hinges could be hot from all the heat in the air."

Zuko nodded and tentatively he reached out and began to successfully push the pin out through the top of the hinge, understanding what he was doing now, Zuko made quick work of the rest of them. Once all the pins were out, all they needed to do was knock the door down, easy right?

No, not easy at all. Zuko told Chang to take cover and he tried kicking the door down, over and over and over… Until *Sokka's leg* was sore from watching him.

"It's!"

Kick.

"Not!"

Kick.

"Working!"

Kick.

Zuko seemed out of breath at this point and Sokka noticed the slightest grey tint in the veins of his neck… now that he was looking more closely, he could see just how pale Zuko was under the light from the surrounding fires.

"Alright Zuko, new plan… we need to try to find something to shove under the door and hoist it up, it might be stuck, we just need to dislodge it."

Zuko nodded and he and Sokka began shuffling through the different crates and along the (not actively burning) walls, looking for something that might work as a wedge for the door. Sokka saw the open back door and realized there was a whole mess of metal stacked behind the kitchen.

He took off running, stopping suddenly when he got to the open back door, a sudden surge of fear gripped his throat. Peeking his head out, he looked out into the darkness, it was as if the moon saw his struggle to see because the moonlight broke through the smoke and shed a little light for Sokka. The brief blessing of light made it so Sokka could see the area was clear of earth benders and guards.

It didn't take long to find what he needed in the pile of scrap metal and soon enough, he and Zuko were back to standing in front of the door, this time they had a long metal bar sticking out of the bottom of the impossible door.

"On the count of three, and a real three, not your fake 'get ready one – pop' shit you pulled earlier with my arm."

Sokka wasn't looking back at Zuko but he could *feel* the other boy smirking behind his back. Sokka counted down and both boys used their weight to move the pry and thank-the-fucking-spirits, the door made an awful scraping metal sound (that *almost* gave Sokka flashbacks to when he was locked in the metal box) and the door fell out of their way. Zuko made sure the door was no longer a problem with a few frustrated stomps before they entered the room.

When they walked into the office, Sokka's heart fell... *hard* and *fast*… The ceiling had collapsed inside and Chang was trapped under a maze of derbies, along with another support beam mixed into the mess. One the walls of his office had been impacted by an earth bending attack, causing the entire thing to basically implode. One of Chang's legs was clearly broken, it was obvious from the way it was bent under a large boulder that must have been used in the attack.

He could have been working late in his office, which meant that it might not have been that late when the attacks started…. Chang never saw it coming. Sokka glanced at Zuko and the boy's eyes were wide, his pupils were shifting around to all the different obstacles in front of him. Sokka knew the loyal fire bender was deciding what to do, but it would be *impossible* to unbury Chang and of course Sokka knew this... but…

Maybe if the massive man was his own size or even Shen's size… but Chang was *huge* and his leg was